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THE
GENUINE SPEECH
OF
MR. SHERIDAN,
DELIVERED IN THE
HOUSE OF COMMONS;
ON A CHARGE OF
HIGH CRIMES AND MISDEMEANORS,
AGAINST
WARREN HASTINGS, Esq.
Late GOVERNOR GENERAL of BENGAL;
FOR
EXTORTION, PERFIDY, AND CRUELTY,
TO THE
PRINCESSES, and other BRANCHES of the ROYAL
FAMILY of OUDE.

THE SECOND EDITION.
FAITHFULLY REPORTED.

LONDON:

Printed for W. RICHARDSON, Bookfeller, under the
ROYAL-EXCHANGE.

OF THE

OF THE

HOUSE OF COMMONS

IN PARLIAMENT ASSEMBLED

WILLIAM IV.

BY APPOINTMENT

PRINTED BY

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P R E F A C E.

THE subject of this publication forms an illustrious epoch in the history of British Eloquence. In no former period did the national senate possess such eminent speakers as the present. But no exertion made by any of them, on any subject, has produced effects equal to those which have followed the speech of Mr. Sheridan. There is, at least, no instance in ancient or modern times, that demonstrates so emphatically the power of a just elocution on the human mind. It rivetted above five hundred people to the benches for nearly six hours. The profoundest silence all that time pervaded the whole House, and individuals were so wrapped up in attention that they seemed afraid to breathe.

He was reduced, before he had done, to a whisper, and notwithstanding an utterance exceedingly rapid, though singularly distinct, not a syllable was lost in any part of the House. Even the passages, which are often noisy during the best speeches, by Members going out and in, were perfectly clear and quiet. And when Mr. Sheridan sat down the whole House, relieved from a most extraordinary stretch of attention, burst aloud into an involuntary peal of the most universal and unanimous applause.

Several gentlemen who took notes have cordially and generously produced them, for rendering this Report as complete as possible. They presume to call the result of their united contributions genuine with the greater confidence, that though much statement and refer-

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reference is necessarily omitted, all the most brilliant passages are preserved in their native purity. Most of these Mr. Sheridan could not give more exactly as delivered. Nor have they any where fastidiously avoided his language, merely because it may have found its way into a news-paper. It is one proof among others of its excellence, that the Reports of the day were in general so replete with his identical phrasiology. Indeed all his points were so happily put that few who heard, can ever thoroughly forget them.

The Editors are sorry they have not been able to do this celebrated speech more justice, and that the Author's extreme delicacy extorted from them those notes which they would gratefully have sacrificed to his—but as there are certainly much more correct than any that have yet appeared—as there is little probability of his ever publishing his own copy,—as the general curiosity is still far from being satisfied, and—as nothing delivered to a company of not less than five hundred in number, can be suppressed or prevented circulating perhaps with as much effect as in the shape of any printed pamphlet whatever; they conceived themselves no longer under any obligation of with-holding them from the public.

depositions he had taken at Lucknow were made in the Persian language, and that they were translated and sworn to by Mr. Hastings's private interpreter. He was therefore desirous that the information contained in this document might be laid before the Committee, and that Sir Elijah Impey should be called to the bar to give in what corrections he thought his evidence required.

It was accordingly agreed to call in Sir Elijah Impey, but that gentleman not appearing, *Mr. Sheredian* arose and addressed the Chairman of the Committee substantially as follows :

MR. ST. JOHN,

I do very sincerely wish the corrections of Sir Elijah Impey, in the paper now read by my Hon. Friend (Mr. Dempster) had been formally received by the Committee,

mittee, and made part of the evidence on record. Facts substantiating a delinquency so enormous and complicated as the charge exhibits, cannot be too accurately and minutely stated. I would not for my own part have less than the fullest conviction in clearing innocence, or establishing guilt, especially where the character of a Minister and the national reputation are obviously at issue. I should indeed, think myself but ill-prepared for doing justice to an argument in which I engaged solely from a sense of public duty, were so trivial an occurrence to divert me from a pursuit which I am solemnly pledged to fulfil. The claims of the Committee, the public, and the cause of humanity, are irresistible. But so far is the want of this paper from depreciating, impairing, or infeebling that great body of evidence which supports the accusation of the late Governour General, that it would only have involved him in still greater perplexity. In my opinion the
proof

proof is abundantly clear and satisfactory. The light at least in which it appears by the documents before the public, and the statements made at your bar, is so perfect that any attempt to increase would only darken its lustre.

Of such important materials, such enormous delinquency, such a series of daring and unprincipled transactions, does the charge before the Committee consist, that it is impossible to develop the obliquities in which those high crimes and misdemeanours originated without entering at some length on the detail. I shall be obliged to trespass considerably on the time and patience of the Committee, but the complexity of the case on which they are now to decide, the numerous references it makes, the many extraordinary remarks it suggests, and above all, the infinite interests it involves, must, for the present, bear me out. I shall not, therefore, be at very much pains in establishing the

the great moment and extreme urgency of this prosecution. That Parliament may be better employed than in following up the enquiry into past malversation, disclosing the imperfections of a government, supported by such a series of brilliant events, or by substantiating the charge which it is my lot to bring forward, are opinions, which, though circulated with much assiduity, can have no weight with the House. Is it now, after so many years investigation, and when we are but just within reach of our object, that the business is to be abandoned, that the solemn inquiry of Parliament is to be traduced, that our proceedings are to be marked with insignificance and ridicule, that delinquency of the most complicated and atrocious description is to defeat the requisitions of insulted justice, that the representatives of a free people are to become the abettors of oppression and outrage, that the expectations of the injured and helpless are to be frustrated, and that the faith of the nation,

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so emphatically pledged by the frequent votes of this House, is to be thus rashly sacrificed? No, Sir. The magnitude of the whole enquiry has been stamped by the sanction of Parliament. The indefatigable attention you have paid to the management of India, for several sessions, successively, the various Committees you appointed, the voluminous reports they have made on the subject, the frequent motions which from time to time have been agitated concerning it in this House, the many strong and pointed resolutions you have adopted, the earnest and repeated recommendations of Majesty to resume and prosecute the discussion, your ready and solemn assurances to comply with these recommendations, are all undeniable proofs that the consideration is of the last importance, and tends to establish these plain and broad facts, that you acknowledge the British name and honour to have been tarnished and foully prostituted by the notorious criminality of the Company's servants in
India ;

India ; that their conduct deserved the judicial cognizance of the nation, that the character of public justice in this country is absolutely at stake, that the Supreme government of Bengal, especially under the direction of Warren Hastings, held your authority in defiance and contempt, and that his official deportment was fraught with such instances of maladministration as render the present investigation at once solemn and indispensable.

It is utterly impossible for any language to place the subject in a more affecting, momentous, and urgent point of view, than your own proceedings have done. And how are these proceedings interpreted by the public and the world at large? You are considered as under the strongest and most direct stipulations to bring this flagrant and pointed case to an immediate issue, to apply the mass of information you have collected with so much trouble for the purposes of general utility, to give effect to the several
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acts of the Legislature, that they may be no longer regarded as so much waste paper in the statute books, and to hold up an emphatic and secure example of official depravity to persons in responsible situations, that turpitude, however high, that venality however screened, that motives of insatiable cruelty, however coloured by the stale pretexts of duty, may receive that odium, that execration, that punishment which is undoubtedly their due. How are you to satisfy the universal curiosity which your deliberations in Parliament have excited, the feelings of solicitude for the rescue of a character loaded with imputation, or the condemnation of crimes which challenge you to enquiry without determining on the evidence before you, and reducing the various resolutions you have formed to rules of conduct. A paper, signed Warren Hastings, has been just put into my hand, which he probably means as a second defence of his proceedings against the Princesses of Oude. It does not contain a
statement

statement which is not already before the House, but it discovers a very strong propensity to disguise and misrepresent facts known and established. How far such a clandestine mode of pre-possessing your judgment, is regular or calculated to inspire a favourable opinion of his cause, the Committee must decide. Neither am I apprehensive you can in any degree be affected by the artful insinuations so industriously circulated without doors, that following up the charges of High Crimes and Misdemeanours against Mr. Hastings is an intrusion on the business of Parliament, and that the French commercial treaty and other matters equally pressing, ought, in compliance with public expectation and solicitude, to have at least the preference. Such suggestions betray their origin, and are certain indications of despondency, in a cause incapable of better defence. This House knows its own dignity too well and the propriety of sustaining that dignity by giving effect to its own

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resolutions, to admit, for a moment, that any subject can be more important or more urgent than establishing the responsibility of office. And you will permit me to ask, can we be better employed than in rescuing millions of innocent and helpless people from the savage grasp of despotism, than in restoring the credit of the British name from the odium it has incurred by the rapacity of the Company's servants in India, than in giving a strong and adequate example of that justice, in deciding on over-acts of power, which has generally characterized the liberality and equality of our happy constitution? To the honour of this House the world is already satisfied that we are in earnest. To the honour of Parliament the process goes on. To the honour of the Committee, in which I now stand, you have, in one of the charges against the late Governour General of all India, pronounced your solemn award, that he deserves to be impeached. To the honour of the Right
Hon.

Hon. Gentleman * he avowed his convictions of the crimes alledged, and manfully agreed with the resolution of the Committee. The monstrous argument set up against all this, that delinquencies of office were to be compounded, and that the important services of Mr. Hastings ought to be sustained as an apology for his misconduct, was reprobated by a vote, which records the equity of our decisions. Where is the abettor of Indian delinquency, who dare now assert that though Committees reports addresses and acts, King, Lords, and Commons, were against Mr. Hastings, he was not to be assailed, he was the Saviour of India, his conduct was great, irreproachable, and meritorious, and he had the thanks of his constituents formally awarded to him in a general court of the Proprietors in his pocket. The whole of your proceedings, Sir, establish this great manly and constitutional maxim, that such instances of personal outrage, were acts which no political necessity could justify,

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and

* Mr. Pitt.

and that Mr. Hastings's treatment of the unfortunate Cheit Sing was an act of that description. And I adopt from my heart the words of the Right Hon. Gentleman * on that occasion, They were, that the Committee, in the administration of Mr. Hastings found "*Acts of strong injustice, of grinding oppression, and unprovoked severity.*"

The Committe in this memorable decision have done honour to the character and principles of my Right Honourable Friend † whose conduct has been foully aspersed by the slanderous tongues of ignorance and perversion. The facts established give the lie to all the indignities of detraction and all the fabrications of malignity. Your vote on that great question declares that the man who brought the charges, at whose influence the prosecution has been instituted, is no false accuser, that he is not influenced by pique or envy, that he is instigated by no unwor-

* Mr. Pitt, † Mr. Burke,

unworthy motives to blacken a spotless name, but that his honour in no action of a most honourable life was ever more un sullied than in awakening the justice of the country against one of its greatest enemies. After ages will take this picture not from the libellous representations of men who can stoop to the infamy of abetting wickedness armed with power, not even from the splended exertions of a great and polished mind, though if these were not enough to immortalize him, where is the man who has any claim on immortality, but from the virtues of his heart and the labours of his life in the cause of innocence and humanity! He is enrolled in the journals of this House, and by the part he has taken in this enquiry, as the able, ardent, indefatigable, and successful champion of oppressed multitudes, as the instrument in the hands of a just Providence of humbling their insolent and proud oppressor.

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The Committee have done more. What is the sentence you have pronounced but a solemn pledge to India of your concern for her welfare, of the deep interest you take in her government, of your serious determination to protect her rights. You have said to her, in a tone that even now inspires her with hope, that you do not mean to insult her distress by any farther expedients only temporary and incompetent. You shall have no more remedial acts. You shall no longer be seduced by the delusions of a moment or be amused by a titled governour or a vapouring set of resolutions. No. You shall see an immediate end to your grievances and have the substantial consolation of beholding the relentless author of your injuries called to a strict and severe account. This will bind your dependences in every part of the globe by ties so much the stronger as their confidence in your integrity is strengthened. You have set up a beacon or mark not only for a guide to your own
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conduct, but for an example to all the nations on earth. And Great Britain has the glory of towering above her surrounding neighbours as much for the impartial administration of justice as for her political pre-eminence and power. And I make no doubt but in your manly and firm determination to go through the whole of this complicated business with the same steady attention to equity and fact in which you have begun, you may safely challenge the whole universe to observe and judge of you by the result.

If ever there was a question on which enquiry has been full, deliberate, dispassionate, and correct, it is certainly the present. Not an influence of temerity can be attached to any page or part of the prosecutions. There undoubtedly are many party questions on which a partial conviction may be supposed a matter of easy acquisition. But if this is to be considered merely as a bone of contention between political parties, it

it is infinitely too trifling to occupy our attention a moment. And the levity of such as consider it in no higher a light is at least pardonable. But I profess to God I feel in my own bosom the strongest personal conviction of the facts charged against the conduct of Mr. Hastings towards the Begums of Oude. There are many gentlemen now in the Committee who have avowed to me the same conviction of his guilt. It is in this conviction that I believe from my heart the treatment of these illustrious women comprehend every species of human profligacy. The statements in this case, accuses, to the Supreme Council, under the direction of Mr. Hastings,—of rapacity barbarous and insatiable—Of treachery, cool and premeditated—Of oppression, wanton and unprovoked—Of breach of faith, black, perfidious, and unexpected—Of cruelty, unmanly and unmerciful. These are the crimes, dark and atrocious as they are, of which in my soul and conscience I accuse Mr. Hastings,
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and of which I have the confidence to say I shall convict him. The proofs are produced, and admissible to every gentleman in the Committee. Those who are ready to come forward as the advocates for this complicated delinquency, and I doubt not there are many, I desire to watch me narrowly, and challenge their severest inspection of every thing I advance. I will leave nothing without the minutest proof; and wish for no credit but where I am supported by the evidence before the Committee.

Surely Mr. Hastings will not pretend that his reply to the present, like those he gave to the other charges, is extorted from him in a hurry. He had time enough at least to make it up. But I desire to know in what it excels those productions which he alledges were done with so much haste? Does he adduce any new or original evidence to counteract the effect of what the Committee received last year? Does he offer any reasons that are likely to satisfy you and the public, that in the high and im-
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portant office with which he was solemnly invested by the British Legislature and the East-India Company, he did his duty with fidelity and honour? Does he refute the multitude of stubborn facts which are stated to substantiate his criminality? Does he even pretend that he had no influence, or but small influence, in many transactions which he does not so much as attempt to vindicate? Does he any where throw down the gauntlet, like a man conscious of integrity, and proud to be tried by his peers, or solicitous to abide by the solemn award of his country? What then is the purport of this superfluous paper, thus meanly and insidiously imposed on the attention of the Committee? Does it not betray the apprehensions he begins to feel? or does he wish you to be startled and dazzled at the temerity of his proceedings? or think the Committee are disposed to repose the same implicit confidence in his professions, that he so often insinuates it was the duty of his employers to do? That such must be the drift of his argument

gument is evident from his attempt to practice on the credulity of the Committee by an obvious and striking inclination to prevaricate in almost every particular ; the bluntness of his negatives ; the boldness of his assertions ; the solemnity of his declamation ; his profound hypocrisy ; a coarse farago of flimsy sophistry, and a wonderful fertility in the arts of evasion.

I solicit again the attention of the Committee to every assertion which I advance. I desire them to consider my statements with vigilance, jealousy, and circumspection ; but at the same time I hope that they will not be so far biaſſed as to preclude the operations of conviction. My witness ſhall be Mr. Haſtings himſelf ; and I declare, that I will not advance the leaſt ſhadow of a fact without authenticating every particular by the very words which proceeded from his own mouth. As an exculpation of his atrocity, Mr Haſtings ſays, that ſimilar means had been adopted in the year 1776, which were obliged to be followed in 1781. This is an

argument of a very extraordinary nature. If the Committee were to admit the propriety of such a mean subterfuge, the world would immediately apprehend, that this respectable assembly was not composed of men of discernment—not of men of humanity—not of men whose ears were open to the cries of the miserable—but of wretches who degraded the human species, by acts of the most unaccountable and contemptible idiocy. If a similar transaction had taken place in the year 1776, was that any reason that Mr. Hastings should continue the same series of perfidy and oppression? Had this plea any tendency to alleviate his infamy? Is there a gentleman in this House who has the boldness to support such poor sophistry? No: I am perfectly convinced, that the most strenuous of Mr. Hastings's friends would never dare to stand forward on such feeble premises; if they attempted to rear such a fortress, the foundation would be destroyed, and the superstructure annihilated. The transaction to which Mr. Hastings alludes

ludes may be, "the threats of military execution resorted to in the year 1776, to exact the payment then made by the Begum;" nor would any softer methods have availed, as she declared that she would sooner throw her treasures and jewels into the river, than advance to the Nabob a single rupee. Her jewels, cloaths, and household utensils, were permitted to be taken in default of ready money payments, and converted to the Company's use by public auction in Calcutta, without any disapprobation signified by the Council General, either of the principle on which the claim had been made on the Begum, or the mode of enforcing it. All delicacy was necessarily laid aside; and it now became a question, "Whether the Nabob (as Mr. Bristow stated) should *seize his right*, or suffer a lack of souls to perish, and the sovereignty of these provinces to be transferred to another family." This is the brilliant example of 1776, which Mr. Hastings was emulous to follow. This is the sanguinary gem, to which he nobly aspired.

pired. But from the minutes of the Board at Calcutta it appears, that the Nabob had affirmed, the treasures possessed by his mother and grandmother, as well as their jaghires, were possessed by them in their own right; and that he had solemnly engaged never to disturb their quiet possession. Mr. Hastings, however, with a facility peculiar to himself, controverts the hesitations of the Nabob; and insists, that from the tenor of the Mahomedan law, he had a right to the jaghires and treasures, being the residue of his father's fortune, left for him in trust.

It does not seem to me a favourable circumstance for Mr. Hastings, that he is obliged, in vindicating his own government in 1781, to refer to that of the Majority for a precedent in 1775. Wretched indeed must that man be, who has no better apology for his actions than exemplary wickedness. I deny, however, that his accusations of that Government are made out by any documents he has yet produced. And it is in his usual stile of characteristic effrontery,
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that he would found the justification of his own administration on the measures of one which he constantly reprobated in language of coarse, unqualified, and systematic virulence. Who that has read his curious and extraordinary defence but must have remarked, that it does not contain one fact fairly stated, one quotation accurately made, one conclusion correctly drawn from the premises. It is a medley of paradox and contradiction, garbled record, inapplicable narration, mutilated statement, presumptuous sophistry, and prefaced with a specimen of more laboured and disgusting arrogance, contained in a few paragraphs of inflated, unintelligible phraseology, than is to be found in this or perhaps any other language. What were the steps taken by the Supreme Council or their Resident in 1775, and the subsequent year, on which the jet of the defence turns, and by which so many daring efforts have been made to mislead parliament and the public? Afaph ul Dowlah finding himself in deep arrears to the Company, was instigated by the
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creatures in whose management they had placed him, to extort, under a variety of pretexts, several large sums from his aged parents, amounting in all to at least six hundred and thirty thousand pounds. These illustrious personages, however, refused to liquidate the last demand that was made on them, except on certain specific terms, that in future they might know on what tenure they held the remainder of their property. To secure, therefore, the inheritance assigned them by the will of his Highness the late Vizier, and that the son on no account whatever should molest them in the possession of his father's bounty, and well knowing whence all his former exactions originated, they demanded that this family compact should be guaranteed by the Governor and Council General. The Government of Calcutta readily complied with a requisition so just and natural. A treaty, involving these stipulations, was actually executed with every possible formality between the Nabob and his parents. It received at the same time the solemn

lemn guarantee of Mr. Bristow, the British Resident, then at Oude, and who on this occasion acted under the authority, and with the express consent, of the Supreme Council. It is this treaty which Mr. Hastings would convert into an argument for its violation. The efforts of the very system he explodes, to secure the jagheers and treasures of the Begums, are thus forcibly erected into a precedent for resuming the former, and seizing the latter. The guarantee of the Company is no longer preserved than it is profitable. Does Mr. Hastings imagine, that the silly and absurd pretext of a claim which he insinuates was set up at that time by the son on the wealth of his two aged relations, will be credited by the Committee or the Public? Is he aware how frequently he has falsified his own assertions; and that the means of conviction are on record under his own signature? Or can he be so bigoted to the conceit he has of his abilities, and arts of deception, as to presume that he may find in the perplexity and extent of his case

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a subterfuge from every allegation against him, every deed of rapacity he has committed, every violation of justice he has authorized. He avows on this, as on all other occasions, the stale and barbarous plea of emergency; that the public expenditure is not to be narrowed, while the subject has a shilling to advance; that he had a right to make the supposed exigence of the treasury the standard of his pecuniary exactions; and that public necessity was always a sufficient warrant for private extortion. Are not these principles at which the heart of every Englishman not debased by slavery, or debauched by power, instinctively revolts? Yet these are the principles which Mr. Hastings opposes to charges of callous and systematic cruelty and corruption, or rather the very decent, and, as he expects, competent plea, for authorising these detestable crimes.

I do wish the Committee to bear in mind,
that the minutes of Gen. Clavering, Col.
Monson,

Monson, and Mr. Francis, which were then entered in the public consultations of the Board, amounted only to this opinion; that women, by the Mahommedan law, were entitled only to the property of their husbands within the Zenana or Seraglio where they lived. It was upon this opinion, founded on the laws and customs of Eastern nations, that they decided; and the decision was followed by such a ready and cordial acquiescence, as shewed a coincidence of sentiment in the Council of Calcutta and the Durbar of the Begums. No compulsion was therefore the consequence of a measure thus unexceptionable. Mr. Bristow used no threats, no mean compliances. Military execution, the common substitute for law in that miserable country, was here unnecessary. The Begums owned the equity of our Government, and granted the requisition in its fullest extent. The disputed property then claimed was accordingly given up without hesitation or reluctance, and articles of stipulation, mutually acceding to

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the conditions I have already stated, were then also ratified between the Vizier and his parents. After this, could there be any altercation about the rights of the parties, in matters thus accurately discriminated, thus solemnly ascertained, thus formally guaranteed? There certainly could be none. The prescriptions of the Mahommedan law were clearly traced, and its limitations fixed. But all these idle and foolish references are foisted on the attention of mankind, only to puzzle and abuse their understandings; for it is obvious he was absorbed in the pursuit of the treasures. It was no resentment against the impotent efforts of two old women; no paroxysm of public spirit from the seditions that distinguished their councils, no violent passion for the laws of Mahomet, that fired him on this occasion to hurl all the terrors of Government against the Zenana. The treasures transported him beyond himself; they excited all his ardour; and he persevered in realizing his wishes in seizing them, with equal enthusiasm and intrepidity.

intrepidity. This was the original pretence he made to his masters for the measure, as he knew experimentally that no defalcation which augmented their interest, would, among them, operate against his. This was the source of all the cruelties that ensued, and, indeed, of all the outrageous instances of barbarity, that blacken the period of British infamy in the empire of Indostan, under his administration. Still he recurs to Mahomedism for an excuse, as if there were something in the institutions of Mahomet, that made it meritorious in a Christian to be a savage; that rendered it criminal to treat the inhabitants of India with humanity or mercy; that even made it impious in a son not to plunder his mother.*

* Mr. Sheridan went into the detail of these particulars with a minuteness, a point, and a brilliancy, to which no human memory can do justice. Without, therefore, attempting to follow him through his numerous and extensive quotations, we can only present
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The Nabob, on several pressing occasions, had received from the Begums pecuniary assistance; but his prodigality to the emissaries of the Company became so notorious, that the Begums easily foresaw there could be no end to his demands. It was this hesitation on their part that produced the treaty which the agent of the Supreme Council guaranteed. Under this sanction of the sum stipulated, eleven lacks of rupees were paid in goods, and the rest in cash. The Begums were consequently induced, from their confidence in our protection, to give the Nabob a full discharge for all the money they had lent him. It was, as Mr. Hastings would have the Committee believe, on exactly the same principles that he stipulated with

the reader with a few of those beautiful and striking comments which he made on the evidence as he proceeded, and which by their justness and simplicity, were evidently most affecting and impressive,

with the Vizier, for the exprefs purpose of robbing his parents of their inheritance and treasure. This he attempts to palliate by asserting, that he only executed the resolutions of the Board, who ordered, that the Begums, who succeeded to all the treasures, should therefore pay all the sums due to the Company; and that Mr. Francis expressed his astonishment that the Begums, in a country where they were not permitted free agency, even in domestic concerns, should yet be allowed to interfere between the Nabob and the Company. All this is black and false. The Board immediately took fire, and dispatched an exprefs to Mr. Bristow, to know whether he had any concern in the business. In fact, Mr. Bristow did fully exculpate himself; and Mr. Hastings asserts, that he was an inefficient member of the Board; that the majority divested him of all responsibility; and that he was equally excluded from any share in those acts which he approved or disapproved. In this manner it is that he endeavours to elude
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the conviction and consequences of his guilt ; that duplicity of conduct takes refuge in effrontery of assertion ; and that in the face of enquiry, to maintain or cover the fraud in which he has been so long a practitioner, he wraps himself up in obscurity, obliquity, and masquerade.

Here then is a guarantee appended with all due solemnity to a treaty which both parties seemed at the time to think permanent and lasting. It is the breach of this treaty, the violation of this guarantee, the not only withdrawing our protection, but actually becoming the aggressors, to which I now call the attention of the Committee. Where is the British faith ? What has become of that awful sanction which has proved the consolation of so many nations, and the glory of our own ? Is it thus that our allies are betrayed, and the credit we have hitherto preserved made the instrument of sporting with the wretched ? Who is the man to whom we owe such dishonour ? And what description of criminality merits con-
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dign punishment, if he is treated with impunity? Examine the grounds he states for having thus flagrantly departed from the obvious dictates of justice and humanity. “ Their conduct (he says, speaking of the Begums) in openly and most valiantly opposing by armed force the Nabob’s orders for the resumption of the jagheers, though they were not to be losers by it; their exciting their agents and other Jagheedars to unite in forcible resistance; and lastly, the subsequent information which was obtained by their zeal and activity in supporting the rebellion of Rajah Cheyt Sing, and spreading its consequences through the Nabob’s dominions, for the declared purpose of our extermination, nearer the grounds of withdrawing the Company’s guarantee and of the consequence confiscation of their treasures.”

But what are the facts in which all these strong assertions are founded? No other resistance was made to the resumption of the

jagheers than any one would make to the ruffian who attempts to plunder him. There is not a single document existing, or fact on record to prove, that either the Begums, or their ministers, were active in fomenting sedition. The country, it is true, were incensed. The outrages every where perpetrated by the English, or their incendiaries, had rendered them desperate. There surely needed no excitement to disturbances, where people lived in continual dread of their lives and properties, or had any spirit to protect them. So far were they from aiding or abetting the insurrection of Benares, that they actually saved some parties of the British army from inevitable destruction. Yet such is the fallacious statement in Hastings's defence, that he clears himself, and struggles to fix the guilt on the sufferers; that he expects to have the credit of acting fairly, while violating every human obligation; that he should be applauded for that, without the punishment of which no society could exist.

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I declare, Sir, from my conscience, that the system which Mr. Hastings then followed, in his government of India, may be termed a series of unparalleled cruelty, oppression, and plunder. He acted diametrically opposite to the command of Parliament and the East India Company; and the Committee of the Commons have frequently reprobated his principles. But, says Mr. Hastings—Look not back to the records—Weigh not the enormities of my past crimes—Listen to my own defence—I will prove, that every article of peculation, rapin, and murder, ascribed to my measures, proceeds from the antipathies of my enemies, who have resolved to persecute me to the utmost extremity. Poor unfortunate gentleman! He happens to have his tranquil moments annoyed by the cries of injured innocence! I protest, that no man but the immaculate Mr. Hastings, would have dared to come to the bar of this House, and argued upon the grounds of his innocence. After the proofs which

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I have already advanced, I am ashamed to trouble the Committee with the production of more facts ; and were I not sensible, that a very considerable majority of my auditors were already satisfied, I declare to God, Sir, that I would sit down at this moment without proceeding one single step farther. But I flatter myself that the Committee, notwithstanding the conviction which must now operate in their minds, will excuse my entering more fully and explicitly into the particulars, to substantiate every part of the accusation of my Right Hon. Friend beyond the shadow of a doubt.

With regard to Sir Elijah Impey, he acted a very reprehensible part in the transaction of Oude. There was no necessity for his interference. He in particular ought not to have agreed to the infraction of the treaty of Chunar. The breaking of that treaty brought an indelible stain on the British character in India, and exposed to the world the perfidy of the Company's
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Governors. Mr. Hastings, as a palliation of his guilt, affirms, that the Munny Begums had conspired to exterminate the English. What a futile argument! These Princesses had always reposed the greatest confidence in the honour and integrity of the English; and to prove the insignificance of the position, it need only be mentioned, that three years had elapsed since it was reported this extraordinary contrivance had been agitated. Can any man for a moment imagine, that Mr. Hastings would have suffered such a dangerous conspiracy to pass all that time unnoticed? Would he, whose penetrating eye discerned the least defection or dissatisfaction of the powers in alliance--- would he have remained supine at such a critical juncture? The absurdity is too obvious to require an answer.

In the year 1780, the Board of Directors were so much dissatisfied with Mr. Hastings, that they reprobated his conduct in the warmest language, particularly that part of
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it which related to the oppression of the Indian Princes. This was not more extraordinary than true---and a violent act it must have been indeed, when the Directors were shocked at it !

I now, Sir, come to the year 1781, when Mr. Hastings departed from Calcutta to Benares. His tour commenced on the 7th of July, 1781, and is notorious for the origin of various illustrious facts. Mr. Hastings at that time, as related by Sir Elijah Impey, said that he had only two resources—Benares and Oude. What was he to derive from those two resources ? Not the collection of a just revenue—Not the voluntary contributions of people attached to the Company from sincere motives of esteem and gratitude—But the exaction and extortion of pretended debts, and the plunder of the innocent. It was exactly like the malversation of a highwayman, who, in justification of his crimes, should say, that he had only two resources—Bagshot and Hounslow !

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Mr. Hastings defends his infamous outrage against the Princesses of Oude, by resorting to the laws of the country; but it is not recorded in any Oriental system, that the Nabob, who acted from the instigation and incitement of Mr. Hastings, could by any means be justified. But why should the Nabob be mentioned? There is no guilt in his conduct. He was only an innocent instrument, insiduously spurred on by a diabolical mind. There could be no legal claim, as the jagheers alluded to, were left to the Begums by the late Nabob, Sujah Dowla, for the maintenance and education of the children, consequently the whole might be considered as an act of extortion. Avarice and ambition were Mr. Hastings's motives. His wanton rapacity was never countenanced by the Board. The Nabob acted with the greatest reluctance; and no circumstance could, in the eye of humanity, justify the military exertion of a son against his mother and grand-mother. Observe the artifice of Mr. Hastings—When the
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transaction became to be censured and execrated, he then, and not till then, threw off all responsibility, by appealing to the orders of the Board. This is a wretched evasion, for at that very period he knew the authority of the Board was vested in himself alone, there being only one other member, and the Governor having the casting vote. This mode of acting would nearly resemble the following hypothesis:—If I, Sir, in the course of five or six years were to become a warm admirer of Mr. Hastings's administration, and, changing my principles and opinions, stand forward his champion and panegyrist—Would not some gentlemen who hear me now, charge my memory with the business of this day, and exclaim, —Why this sudden change of opinion?—I could only observe, that I thought so then, but had since altered my sentiments; and that I was not amenable now, for what I then supported in my official character. What would the world think of such mean tergiversation? Is there a Gentleman in this
House

House who would not, in the plenitude of his anger, execrate such a wanton violation of honour?

I shall now mention the particulars of the treaty of Chunar, which treaty Mr. Hastings was resolved should be broken the first opportunity.* It consists of five articles, of which, from the letter of Mr. Hastings, great expectations were formed, “by a singular inversion of its articles.” In this secret negociation, entered into between the Nabob and Mr. Hastings, the former was authorised and stimulated to confiscate, for his own convenience, the patrimonial inheritance of his kindred, the very lands allotted for the subsistence of his parents. The only equivalent allowed the unfortunate victims thus plundered of their wealth, was a pension, amounting only to the net of their property. Nor did even this indulgence extend beyond the few for whom the Company were bound in the late treaty. No security

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* For a copy of the Treaty see the end.

was stipulated for the payment of the pensions, nor any compensation provided for those who had none. The article in the treaty contains a general permission to the Nabob to confiscate and take into his own hands, such jagheers as he might find necessary, which Mr. Hastings very singularly inverted by making the Nabob confiscate whatever he (Mr. Hastings) pleased. The article stipulating for the withdrawing the troops from Oude, Mr. Hastings in some degree fulfilled, but, by a singular inversion, reserved to himself the right to send another army into the province whenever he thought proper. The article relating to the stipulating for the recal of the British Resident, at Furruckabad, and the throwing Fizoola Cawn into the power of the Nabob, Mr. Hastings, by a similar inversion, rendered of no effect. In short, there was in every transaction the most shameful violation of the compact which in every sense ought to have been strictly accomplished.

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The Committee ought to observe, that when Sir Elijah Impey was asked whether before the affair of Oude there existed among the people of the country such a disposition to revolt and exterminate the English, answered, with his usual caution—That he was not sure before the affair of Oude, but after that circumstance, he was perfectly convinced that there did. Good God! Sir, if the oppressed natives of India possessed a spark of liberty—if the unfortunate people had the least idea of honour—their hearts must have revolted at the infamy of the English, and held their perfidy in the greatest abhorrence. When I reflect on this circumstance, I am astonished at the atrocity of the delinquent, and my heart recoils at facts which every where wound my feelings. I wish to God, that Sir Elijah Impey had discharged that duty incumbent upon him as a Judge, and followed the dictates of justice and humanity.

Mr. Hastings set out from Calcutta for the basest of all purposes, and was resolved to make the wretch who opposed him feel the weight of his arm. He could not advance one plausible argument for his conduct. He had no apology to offer, but the arrogant and obstinate determination to govern India by venality and corruption.

The first instance of plunder at this time may be dated from the unprovoked seizure of Bedjeygur, which may be considered as a prelude to the oppressions at Fyzabad. Mr. Hastings, in the height of his wrath, ordered a body of troops, under the command of Major Popham, to attack that place, where the mother of Cheit Sing, a person of amiable manners and singular worth, and all the other women of the Rajah's family, and that of his father, had fixed their residence. Mr. Hastings waved all pretensions to justice; and the only pretext was, that whatever these innocent people possessed should be looked
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upon as the property of the Rajah : Thus he resolved to involve them in the fate of Cheit Sing—to treat them as rebels—and, without accusation or trial, or jury, to force their asylum, and confiscate their treasure. He issued orders to Major Popham to divide the plunder, and his commands were not less cruel and barbarous than peremptory and specific. “ *If the reports brought to me are true, your rejecting her offers, or any negociations with her, would soon obtain your possession of the fort upon your own terms. I apprehend that she will contrive to defraud the captors of a considerable part of the booty, by being suffered to retire without examination. I should be very sorry that your officers and soldiers lost any part of the reward to which they are so well entitled.*” This is another instance of Mr. Hastings’s philanthropy. Notwithstanding the ardour of the troops, and the skill of the officers, the difficulties which attended the siege against the castle of Bedjeygur, protected it to the 23d of November.

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By that time they had proceeded so far that a mine was ready to spring, which they hoped would enable them to storm the place. The only terms which she could obtain from a mercenary power flushed with success, and eager after treasure, was to be allowed fifteen per cent. on the effects in the fort—to reside in the country,—or follow her son, as she might—and in either case to be afforded protection. Even these terms, harsh as they were, and granted with a sternness and illiberality which even the laws of war, prohibit among civilized nations, were grossly violated. The women, who resigned themselves with confidence to the officers, whose faith was pledged to protect them from insult, were abandoned to the examination of the soldiery, who used them with incivility and rudeness, and even stript them of their necessary apparel. This brutality was at least obliquely authorised in a letter from Mr. Hastings to Major Popham, where he hints his apprehension, that these women might, from the
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gallantry of the officers, be treated with too much delicacy. Such a prostitution of character is unparalleled in the history of civilized nations! In case any thing should occur so as to draw upon him the censure and reprobation of the world, Mr. Hastings had wisely provided against the avengency. *You know my necessities—I only take it as a boon—and shall make a restitution when demanded.*

Every service, Sir, which Sir Elijah performed to Mr. Hastings was merely as he declares, from the impulse of friendship; and this Sir Elijah advances as an argument for his extraordinary journey to Lucknow. Figure to yourself, Sir Elijah Impey, from motives of friendship and a wish to preserve his precious life—Figure to yourself the pretended infirm Chief Justice of Bengal, undertaking a *little airing* of 900 miles for the *recovery* of his *health*, the greatest part of which he went post—a journey of the most imminent danger, which Mr. Hastings

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ings asserts had nearly destroyed his constitution ; yet the bold and adventurous Sir Elijah Impey would brave every peril. But the sagacious Judge of the Supreme Court resolving not to go unrewarded, accepted a place of 8000l. a year, which he enjoys to this day ; and this he considered as a sufficient compensation for the danger which he had passed, and for buffetting the winds of an adverse journey. To prove that of all the places in the world this was the worst for the recovery of a debilitated constitution, and for the enjoyment of pleasure, it need only be remarked, that one of the Nabob's Ministers had declared it to be—*A speaking picture of famine and woe!* These were the scenes to which Sir Elijah repaired for the restoration of his health ! But the recovery of health and the enjoyment of pleasure, is the only apology for taking this *little airing* across the country. What does he do when he arrives at Lucknow ? He disgraces his Majesty's commission, by commencing Secretary and Amanuensis to Mr.

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prostituted his character for the vilest of all purposes. But all this was performed under the mask of friendship; and on that principle alone, this Oriental Grotius presumed to give his admonition.

Of the expulsion of Cheit Sing, Sir Elijah declined to give any opinion, pretending that he was not sufficiently conversant in the laws of the country; but as to the Begums, when sent for by Mr. Hastings, and asked his opinion through the medium of a very cautious question, he answered without any hesitation. Mr. Hastings wished to be informed, “Whether or not the Begums being in an actual state of rebellion, the Nabob might confiscate their property?”---“Most undoubtedly,” was the answer of Sir Elijah; but here he says he gave his advice, not as a judge, but as a friend. Mr. Hastings, on this occasion, conducted himself with great dexterity. Assuring one of the Duke of Richmond’s data, he said---The Begums being in an actual state of rebellion, may I
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not confiscate their property? and he obtained a complete and satisfactory answer.

It is worthy of observation, that when Sir Elijah was about to depart from Calcutta to Lucknow, he was earnestly entreated by Mr. Hastings not to go to Fyzabad---
 “Go not to Fyzabad---Go not to Fyzabad, the Begum being in actual rebellion, the people will destroy you.” Can it be admitted by the Committee, that Sir Elijah, who was to travel like the wind, would protract his journey by going to Fyzabad, which was near two hundred miles out of his way? The position is ridiculous in the extreme. In fact the whole was a mere pretext, Mr. Hastings being perfectly convinced that at that very moment, there was no rebellion in the country, and that the people were well disposed to the English. But upon Sir Elijah's *return*, when Mr. Hastings had fomented discord and rebellion, by plundering the Begums, *then* he advised the Judge to call at Fyzabad, where

he would have ocular demonstration of the revolt.---From whom were the affidavits obtained?---Not from the disinterested---but from emissaries who were commissioned by Mr. Hastings to meet Sir Elijah or his associates, and inform them that the country was in a state of rebellion, and that from one end to the other there was nothing re-founded but Cheit Sing! arms! and revenge! This being communicated to the scouts who were employed in the service, they could very safely swear that they *heard* such intelligence, and upon these grounds depositions were taken.

To the dark and contracted policy of Mr. Hastings, we owe this very extraordinary treaty of Chunar, and I challenge all the treaties that ever were made, to exhibit so much treachery in so small a compass. He received, on that occasion, a present, or rather a bribe, of a *hundred thousand* pounds. How, and for what reason did he mulct the Nabob Vizier at this rate? The circumstances

stances of the fact are unparalleled. Four months were elapsed before he communicated the matter to the Company, and then, unfortunately for him, the word disclosure was made in language that betrayed his original design. He said *a sum had been thrown in his way, of a magnitude not to be concealed.* Is it then a maxim with the Company's servants to devulge nothing which they can conveniently secrete, to square their honesty by the quantum of the temptation---to squeeze as much from the subject, and account for as little to the public as possible. These are inferences clearly implicated in his own apology, but the transaction is of a nature not to be disguised or qualified. It originated in a principle of the rankest corruption. It was the price of his countrymen, and the English army, whose absence Mr. Hastings sold to the Nabob. Or it was a premium advanced by the Nabob, for an immediate emancipation from a swarm of fortune hunters, who preyed on the country like locusts. It was agreed to withdraw all
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the English gentlemen, and all the English army, and that at the very crisis when the most heavy complaints are made of a general revolt. The contradictions in these facts, are gross and palpable. The finances of the Vizier are in a state of ruin. He acknowledges himself a beggar in every representation he makes on the subject, and Mr. Hastings subscribes to the embarrassment of his affairs, the emptiness of his treasures, the refractoriness of his vassals, and the enormity of his debts. Yet under these circumstances of the most abject poverty and wretchedness, the Nabob presents the Governor with a *hundred thousand pounds*. The country, we are told, was then convulsed throughout, enraged and armed for the express object of extirpating the English. Yet in the midst of all these commotions, and while menaced with the most formidable insurrections from every quarter, it is solemnly stipulated to withdraw the troops. It is thus that in the wantonness of usurpation, the servants and representatives of the Company

pany, impose upon their masters and us ; that fictions are so boldly avowed, to cover rapacity ; and that when the latter is detected, the former vanish. Here is treachery to the Nabob in prescribing conditions which he never meant to fulfil, treachery to the Company in violating the covenant in which he engaged to accept of no presents whatever, and treachery to his Majesty's subjects who though then under his protection he foully sacrificed to the emergency of the moment and the money thrown in his way. He was their friend while under no inducement to be their enemy. They might then harrafs and plunder the miserable inhabitants of Oude with impunity. The virtues of Mr. Hastings, great as they are, have their price. He had the power of relieving the oppressed and the clamour for his interference was universal, ardent, and incessant. But all their importunity, though extorted by the pressure of calamities the heaviest that ever mortals felt or endured was unavailing, till accom-

accompanied with the powerful *docœur* of a *hundred thousand pounds* Their plea was then irresistible. And the patriotic feelings of the Nabob on perceiving something like sincerity in the Governour's acquiescence in this article, do honour to his heart.

“ Though Major Palmer, said he, has not
 “ yet asked any thing, I observe it is the
 “ custom of the English gentlemen con-
 “ constantly to ask something from me be-
 “ fore they go.” This libel on English gentlemen, Mr. Hastings coolly and gravely authenticates as an apology for his own flagitious rapacity. And the moment he pockets the money, turning proudly on his heel, he says, to the victims of his treachery “ Go, you are a pack of op-
 “ pressive rascals. You have plundered this
 “ unhappy man. He appeals to me for
 “ redress, and he shall have it. The ad-
 “ vantages you have taken of his distresses
 “ are scandalous. You have not left him a
 “ shilling, but he has given me a *hundred*
 “ *thousand pounds* to scourge you from his
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“ territories go. He shall in future be at
 “ ease, for I have promised he shall never see
 “ the face of an Englishman again.”

This, however, was the only article in the treaty that he ever affected to fulfil. In all its other parts, if we may credit his own words, he intended to deceive the Nabob at the very moment they were made. Why did he advise *general* instead of partial resumption? That he might involve, in one universal proscription, whoever the Nabob might have wished to exempt? Why, instead of giving instant and unqualified assent to the whole stipulation, did he perpetually vary, explain, and couple them with new diminutions and reservations? That he might ensnare the Nabob, or that the treaty might be obligatory on Asoph ul Dowlah, but not on Mr. Hastings. Notwithstanding these damning instances of the blackest perfidy, he alledges in his defence, that *in all his transactions he conducted himself with the most perfect truth and plain dealing.* Let the

Committee and the public examine the treaty of Chunar by this test. There is not a single feature of *truth or plain dealing* in the whole business. It is altogether a chimera, fabricated for the exigence of the moment; and operates on the credulous mind of the Nabob like the expedient of a swindler. He declares, that *he gave instant and unqualified assent to all the propositions of the Nabob*. This he afterwards explains, by saying, that in the very moment of negotiating *he meant to defeat the design of the treaty*; and that in his own mind *he agreed to the propositions with diminution and reserve*. Here is a specific proof of his *truth and plain dealing*. It would even seem as if he had a pride in substantiating his own duplicity. He agreed to a partial resumption of the jagheers, provided that resumption should be general and indiscriminate—he agreed to recall the army from the provinces of Oude whenever it might suit his own convenience, and no more harass the country with another—he agreed to withdraw the English entirely, but
not

not without an equivalent received. In this manner he coupled a mental reserve with every stipulation in the treaty, with the insidious and profligate intention, as he coolly avows, of defeating the wishes of the Nabob.

Such is the treaty of Chunar, which began in fraud, and ended in violence; and in which it is hard to say, whether the simplicity of the one party, or hardened artifice of the other, be most obvious and striking. The letter which he very soon after wrote to the Resident, Middleton, insinuating, that he and Mr. Johnson were bribed, is a masterpiece, and compleats the mechanism of this dark intrigue. Without supposing his own reputation susceptible even of suspicion, he deigns to feel uncommon tenderness for theirs. These gentlemen, roused by the nicest sense of honour, are forward to declare that they had not been corrupted by any bribe paid or promised. The fact was, and the affidavit proves it, that rumours of the bribery were abroad. It had transpired

beyond the pale of the Durbar. Hastings had not yet mentioned a syllable of the lacks. Perhaps the forebodings of a guilty mind might have prompted him to anticipate the discovery. Is it possible that such a mass of corruption, such complication of falsehoods, can be regarded without indignation? I call upon any gentleman to come forward and justify this treaty by any example in the annals of mankind. Is there any thing in Machiavel, any treachery upon record, any perfidy among individuals or nations, any cold Italian fraud you have ever known or heard of, comparable in any degree to a management thus black and perfidious!

Have not many who affect to admire the man, yet abhor the tyrant, endeavoured to supply his want of principle by extraordinary ability, and find an apology for his crimes in the greatness of his mind. There is undoubtedly something about him, either of parts or property, which for a number of
years

years has possessed a most fascinating influence on the common sense of mankind. But to try the truth of the position, it is proper to define the quality in question. In what, then, does greatness of mind consist, but in great actions, well directed; in executing the best purposes in the best manner; in doing most good by the purest means. False greatness of mind is, indeed, often mistaken for the true. It includes boldness of conception, strength of resolution, readiness of enterprise, and an utter contempt for the obvious distinctions of right and wrong. A mind of no principle, or the worst of principles, may embrace a daring and profligate measure, and pursue it with alacrity and effect to a bad end. But a conduct even of this black and abandoned description, implies a certain degree of foresight, though misapplied; and of wisdom, though perverted. I affirm, without apprehension of contradiction, that the public capacity of Mr. Hastings exhibits no proof that he has any just claim to either the one or the other species

cies of greatness. We see nothing solid or penetrating; nothing noble or magnanimous; nothing open, direct, liberal, manly, or superior in his measures or his mind. All is dark, insidious, sordid, and insincere! Wherever he has option in the choice of his objects, or his instruments, he instinctively settles on the worst. His course is one invariable deviation from rectitude. And the only trace or vestige of system, discernable in the whole of a dozen years administration, is that of "acting without any." The serpent may as well abandon the characteristic obliquity of his motion for the direct flight of an arrow, as he can execute his purposes with honesty and fairness. He is all shuffling, twisting, cold, and little. There is nothing about him open or upright, simple or unmixed. There is, by some strange mysterious predominance in his vice, such a prominence as totally shades and conceals his virtues. There is, by some foul, unfathomable, physical cause in his mind, a conjunction merely of whatever is calculated to make

make human nature hang its head with sorrow or shame. His crimes are the only thing great about him ; and these are contrasted by the littleness of his motives. He is at once a tyrant, a trickster, a visionary, and a deceiver. He affects to be a conqueror and lawgiver, an Alexander and a Cæsar ; but he is no more than a Dionesius and a Scapin. His very writings, though here he wants not for admirers, discover the same intrinsic poverty of intellect, are marked with the same mixture of littleness and pride. All his letters and minutes are dry, obscure, inflated, and uninteresting, without point, spirit, simplicity, or intelligence. He reasons in bombast, prevaricates in metaphor, inveighs in vulgarisms, and quibbles in heroics. So that in composition he hurts the mind's taste, as much as in conduct he offends every feeling of the heart.

Indeed, this extraordinary commixture seem the most prominent feature in the whole

whole complex system of the Company's affairs. A Right Hon. gentleman* opposite to me, who owes much to this system, and has said much about it, in some of the many excellent speeches he has made, had this remark, that the greatest defect in the politics of India was, that they were uniformly founded on mercantile maxims. All their schemes, arrangements, and exertions, sufficiently exemplify this observation. And Mr. Hastings's administration carried this sordid system of commercial policy to its utmost extent. Thus, whatever regulations were adopted, whatever innovations were made, whatever expeditions were undertaken, the great and prevailing object of pecuniary acquisition was never overlooked. It was in this manner that nations have been extirpated for a sum of money; whole tracts of country laid waste by fire and sword, to furnish investments; revolutions occasioned, by an affidavit; an army employed in executing an arrest; towns besieged, on a note of hand; a prince expelled for the ballance of

* Mr. Dundas.

an account ; statesmen occupied in doing the business of a tipstaff; Generals made auctioneers; a truncheon contrasted with the implements of a counting-house; and the British Government exhibited in every part of Indostan, holding a bloody sceptre in one hand, and picking pockets with the other.*

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* The Orator here went into a very long and accurate statement of facts, in which he proved to a demonstration, by a variety of documents, chiefly from Mr. Hastings's own minutes and correspondence, that the Begums, instead of being the ancient disturbers of Government, had always given it their cordial support; that they had not stirred up the Jagheerdars to resist the Nabob, as the Jagheerdars never had been in a state of resistance; and that the jagheerdars, or landholder, did not even resist the resumption of their own jagheers, though, as these were confirmed to them by solemn treaty, Mr. Sheridan vindicated their right of defending them on that ground. But he contended, there was not a single charge against them; and that the Nabob himself, with all the load of obloquy which he incurred, had not once imputed to them the crime of fomenting the least opposition to his authority.

Through this intricate discussion, no human recollection could do him any thing like justice; and we shall content ourselves, in winding up the Speech, with giving, as correctly as possible, such passages only as made the most powerful impression on the House.

To convince the Committee that Mr. Hastings himself first projected the plunder; that he threw the odium in the first instance on the Nabob; and that he traduced the Begums, and loaded them with crimes, even before his acquaintance with the foul aspersions which he afterwards heard, and manufactured into affidavits; let me beg that gentlemen, in canvassing the evidence before them, would pay a particular attention to dates. Nothing will expose more palpably the flimsy apology set up by Mr. Hastings and his friends, or exhibit his official conduct in more affecting colours, than that concatenation of crimes in which it consisted. And this can only appear by carefully comparing the various times, as stated in the various documents, of the respective transactions. From these dates, and the corresponding papers, the following facts are clearly and indisputably established—that the original conception of the business was suggested by Hastings on the 25th of November, 1781—that Middleton communicated the

the idea to the Nabob, and extorted from him a formal proposition on the 2d of December—that on the 1st of December Hastings wrote to Middleton, confirming the first intimation made through Sir Elijah Impey—and that this letter came into the hands of the Resident on the 6th of December. Consider the pains taken by this creature and slave of Hastings, whose authority he had for coercing the Nabob, on whom all the blame is laid, and whose act it was to seize his mother's jagheers, to put all this monstrous and machiavel violence in execution, and to expedite the sanguinary orders of avarice and despotism. Couple this extraordinary conduct with the still more extraordinary minute written by Mr. Hastings on his return to the Board at Calcutta, in which he states, with an obvious intention of imposing both on his masters contemporaries and posterity, this cool and deliberate falsehood; that the resistance of the Begums to the resumption of their jagheers on the 7th of January, 1782, was the cause of seizing their

treasures in November, 1781. Has not Middleton rescued the character of the Nabob, by proving that he had no such intention? In writing to Mr. Hastings so long after the seizure of the treasures has he not expressly said, "that finding the Nabob wavering in his determination of the resumption of the jagheers, I this day, in the presence of his Ministers, informed him, that unless he would issue his perwannahs for that purpose, I would issue my perwannahs."

It well deserves the consideration of the Committee, that the Begums were by no means in a capacity, however hostile their intentions might have been, to give any alarm. Their condition excludes them from almost any intercourse with the other subjects of the state. Their age, their infirmities, the delicacies of their sex, and rank, their religious prejudices, and their situation by the laws and customs of the country, render them, perhaps, the only two souls in India who

who could not in some measure have hurt Government. This I do not state from any apprehension that because there was no motive for plundering the women, it may be asserted an improbable falsehood. I am not, after investigating so many Indian records, to learn, that there is such a thing as wantonness in wickedness. And those who doubt it need only read the wonderful history of Mr. Hastings's administration, which is a medley of meanness and outrage, of duplicity and depredation, of prodigality and oppression, of the most callous cruelty on the one hand, and hollow affection of liberality and good faith on the other.

Who does not regard this ill-fated family with sympathy and commiseration? The same power that crushes and strips the mother, blackens the reputation of the son, and renders him odious and detestable. Middleton wrote to the Governor for his orders on the first of December. He received the dreadful mandate on the sixth, and on the

the nine and twentieth of the same month the whole plunder was compleated. It was, however, suspected such a scene of outrage could not be perpetrated without exciting much clamour and speculation. It therefore became a necessary part of the plot to throw the whole odium on the Nabob, by every where giving out, that the proposition came originally from him. It is here chiefly that the defence of Mr, Hastings so uniformly betrays him. His dernier resort is generally to some fact for which he can produce no document. The very letter in which we are told the Nabob not only gave his consent, but even suggested this detestable measure, has not to this day been forth coming, nor any one paper, article, or authentic record to that effect, notwithstanding the confidence with which it was reported, and the very urgent necessity of substantiating so material a circumstance.

By the Appendix to the Tenth and Fourth Reports, there are the most compleat

pleat proofs that the Begums were never in a state of actual rebellion; but as to the country people, when their souls were roused by an honest indignation at the treachery of Mr. Hastings and his minions, they had every reason to revolt. To contradict this position, it might as well be asserted, that famine would not have pinched—that thirst would not have perished—that extirmination would not have depopulated. The Begums were not instrumental in any disorder or confusion which occurred. Nothing could be more absurd than to attribute a conspiracy or an insurrection to them. They were peaceable in every respect; and, to use a strong expression of Mr. Hastings's on another occasion—"the good that those old women did was certain—the ill was precarious"—Who would not have resisted acts of such enormity? the treasure of these unfortunate women was their treason, and on this account a military force was commissioned to torment them. The country was depopulated—famine was aided—and the

the blood-hounds of war were let loose upon the innocent natives. Here is a scene at which humanity must shudder! Wherever the British army was removed, the trodden oppression sprung up, and called aloud for vengeance. The inhabitants of Oude might be compared to a flight of birds. With fluttering trepidation they croud together in the air on discovering the felon Kite, who, having darted at one bird, and missed his aim, singled out a new victim, and was springing on his prey with redoubled vigour of wing, and keener lightning in his eye. This was the case with Mr. Hastings—having failed in the cause of Cheit Sing, he saw his fate—he felt the necessity of procuring a sum of money, being convinced that was a never-failing argument to make his peace with the Directors.

I now come to the evidence of Mr. Middleton, every part of which proves, that the transactions so much the subject of reprobation were performed by Mr. Hastings

ing's orders. The God of justice forbid that any man in this House should make up his mind to accuse Mr. Hastings on the ground that Mr. *Middleton* condemned the *Begums*; but is there a Gentleman who will say, that the God of justice would forbid any man to stand up, and accuse Mr. Hastings upon better grounds than Mr. *Middleton's* evidence? As to the depositions taken by Sir *Elijah*, they are absurd and contradictory in most places—to prove this it need only be mentioned—That *fifty* British soldiers, guarding 200 prisoners, were surrounded by *six* thousand of the enemy, but miraculously saved by the approach of *nine* men. With regard to the British army, which has been grossly libeled by Mr. Hastings, I must, from various considerations, observe, that they were not nearly so cruel and rapacious as represented. If they were, I am astonished that Mr. Hastings could not find a man who would support his character by stouter swearing. Where any essential documents are called for, Sir

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Elijah,

Elijah and Mr. Middleton remark that the papers are lost. Every gentleman must discover the futility of such conduct, although it certainly had a claim to the consistency of concealing from the Committee as much as possible, every criminating proof. With regard to the evidence, I confess I do not like that memory which recollects better after the lapse of five years, than at the moment when the transaction happened. As to Colonel Harnay's deposition, it ought to be noticed, that Sir Elijah Impey had not the honour of settling that business, as it was taken by Lord Chief Justice Hastings himself. The spirit of the affidavits ought not to be forgotten.—Colonel Gordon, two days after he had been released from the jaws of death, made a deposition against the Bhow Begum, the very person who had been his preserver, accusing her of crimes and rebellion.—Can the great God of justice look down from his eternal throne, upon such premeditated baseness, and not fix some dreadful mark of obliquy upon the offenders!

I now,

I now, Sir, must pause a single moment, while I address myself to a certain description of gentlemen in my eye. I appeal to the other side of the House, where the gentlemen of the law are assembled.—I appeal to one gentleman in particular* who, if rumour speaks truth, will soon be called to succeed a great and venerable character† whose departure from the seat of active justice, was luminous and magnificent, in having been done while he possessed a mind on which time had not power to lay his hand.—I appeal to the learned and respectable gentleman who is spoken of as his successor.—If he will lay his hand upon his heart, and declare as a lawyer, a man of honour, a man of humanity, that the meanest and most abject wretch could be convicted upon such loose, contradictory, and improbable evidence, as the depositions at Lucknow.—If he, or any other gentleman of the law, will affirm that the evidence alluded to was sufficient, I declare to God I will sit down, and trespass

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* Sir L. Kenyon. † Earl Mansfield.

no longer on the patience of the Committee. Mr. Middleton complains in several places, of the perturbed and hesitating conduct of the Nabob.—A son who was about to raise his hand against his mother, might surely be allowed time to ruminate, before he resolved to devote her to destruction.—Mr. Middleton might have been permitted to declare himself to that effect, without being accused of tardiness or a reluctant acquiescence with the obvious tendency of his orders.—

The justice of the East, as exercised by Mr. Hastings and Sir Elijah Impey, is of the most infamous kind; but I hope that the Committee, by their vote of this night, will rescue the British character from the odium into which it has fallen.

The legal proceedings of the East, are libels against justice, and every act which they have passed, is a libel against the Committees who were appointed to investigate the conduct of the East India Company and their

their servants The depositions are libels against common sense. Let us discharge that duty incumbent upon us as fellow-creatures.—Why should we hesitate?—Let it not be recorded to posterity, that we have waited till the cries of injured women—till the ghosts of famished infants—till the spirits of the murdered, have appeared at our bar, and called aloud for justice.

I am utterly at a loss in what terms to describe the attack on the Zenana, the sacred repository of whatever was dear to the late Nabob, when the ministers and domesticks of the Princeesses, were dragged like felons to an ignominious prison, for their exemplary fidelity and probity in the high situation they filled. The confusion, the uproar, the outrage, the screaming of females, the barbarity of the troops, and the tripidation of the neighbourhood, are unaccountable. To whom is the whole series of cruelties and rapine implied in this shocking scene ascribable, but to Mr. Hastings,

ings, under whose authority it was transacted? Let the Committee picture to themselves any of the British Royal Family thus surrounded, assailed, and forced to surrender their property, their servants, their bosom-friends, at the point of a bayonet. To us, at least, who live in a land where every man's house is his sanctuary; where the arm of power dares not intrude; where the constitution has erected an insuperable barrier to every encroachment or outrage, such an instance of violence cannot but appear monstrous and atrocious beyond all example or idea!

Mr. Hastings, affecting in his usual tone of bombast solemnly, the greatest abhorrence at what he calls the complicated treachery of the celebrated Hafiz Rhamut Cawn, who fell at the head of the Rohilla tribes, observes that his destiny “*might induce a mind, but lightly tinged with superstition, to infer the hand of Providence in so just a distribution of its events.*” This great patriot,

patriot, the idol, the philosopher, and the poet of Rohilcund, Mr. Hastings exhibits and upbraids as the usurper of the rights of his patron and master. He thus insults a memory that never can be forgotten in India, by applying to it the most prominent features of his own character. For if his mind retain the least *tincture of superstition*, what must he not feel to conceive the proud spirit of Sujah Dowlah, who reposed the dearest concerns of his house, in the fidelity and friendship of Mr. Hastings, looking down upon the ruin and devastation which he has wrought on that family. What groups of horrors must rise in vision before him, when he thinks of the late Vizier beholding—that Palace which Mr. Hastings had first wrested from him, and afterwards restored—plundered by that very army with whom he had himself vanquished the Mahrattas—seizing on the very spoil which had been ravaged from the devoted Rohillas—a wife and mother whom he adored, an offspring whom he had always treated with
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the most exquisite tendernefs, and whom he left on his death bed to the care and guardianship of Mr. Hastings, exposed to the rudeness of troops, whose swords yet reeked with the blood of the Rohillas ! The impression which recollections thus tremendous and awful, realised and aggravated by a guilty conscience ; must have on the mind of this man, are such as cannot, in spite of all his boasted firmness of nerves, but fill him with consternation and terror !

Mr. Hastings would have us believe that he was ignorant of many transactions imputed to him, before he saw them in charge. That he was regularly acquainted, however, with all the enormities committed on the Begums, there is the clearest proof. The transaction was not, perhaps, detailed minutely. It was probably connected with circumstances which it might not be possible, prudent, or convenient to describe. Middleton was even rebuked for not being more particular and exact. He was tardy
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in action, and cautious in committing what he did to writing. And his communications on this occasion, seem to have been more general and concise than suited the Governor's anxiety and curiosity. But though he did not give him an account of the groans that were heaved, the tears that were shed, the weight of the fetters, or the depth of the dungeon, he stated every step that was taken in the progress and winding up of this relentless tragedy. He told him that to save appearance, it was necessary to use the name of the Nabob, and that it would be improper to go any further than was absolutely indispensable. This surely we may venture to call duplicity, and even treachery, peculiarly aggravated, without being suspected by Mr. Hastings of too *severe a morality*.

From the variety of strong facts in this case, which I have stated to the Committee, and which documents produced by Mr. Hastings himself, irrefragably prove no doubt can remain of his guilt. The acts

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for which he is charged, were altogether his. Those employed in executing his orders, were but so many engines in his hand, and under his controul for giving effect to his measures. They constituted the machinery—it was the genius of Hastings that impelled them to action. Every one knows Mr. Wheeler and Mr. M'Pherson were then Members of the Board at Calcutta, and he is evidently anxious to involve them in the consequence. But have these gentlemen no friends in this House, to rescue their characters from so base an obloquy? Did not the one decline taking any part in the business? and the other did not arrive in India till after its commencement. If, however, the conduct of the Governor General implicated no turpitude, delinquency, or shame, why shift it from his own shoulders? Why anxiously impute to others, what he would have us think absolutely indispensable and meritorious? Did he not shrink from the enquiry ordered by the Court of Directors, and over-rule the motion of Mr. Stables,

Stables, for a reversion of the business in Council, under the new and pompous doctrine that “ *the majesty of justice ought to be approached with solicitation, and that it would debase itself by the suggestion of wrongs, and the promise of redress.*” Conscious at the same time, of the criminality which he could not suppress, he involves himself into still grosser contradictions, by alledging to his masters at home, that it would be *a very severe task for a mother to impeach her son.*

Who subscribes not to the delicacy of the Governor’s feelings in this instance? But why so susceptible in one case, and callous in the other? It was no crime for a son to rob and plunder his mother—but it was enormous in a mother to institute a criminal inquiry against her son.

It is thus that Mr. Hastings sports with all the ties of nature and justice; and in his apologies, as well as his crimes, grossly in-

sults the dearest sensibilities of the human heart ; and that instead of aiming at distinction by a reverence for those eternal dictates of truth and uprightness, which have imparted dignity and honour to the conduct of all the greatest and best of men, he accommodates them on all occasions, to a hollow, crooked, and interested policy !

His picture of justice is a libel on all the forms it ever assumed in society. It arraigns the procedure of this House. The Committees you have appointed, the investigations you have pursued, the examinations you have taken, the reports you have received, are all preposterous and wrong, if Mr. Hastings is right. But God forbid his idea of justice should ever be adopted in this country ; or that the parliament of a great and virtuous people, should appropriate a principle that must un-nerve the whole fabric of our government and constitution. It is high time that this House should vindicate the insulted character of justice. It remains with the Committee
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to dispossess her of Mr. Hastings's splendid drapery, and exhibit her in her true majesty and form; not as a Syren, soothing the profligate in their crimes, but as the inflexible friend of the oppressed, and in the steady pursuit of their oppressors, active, inquisitive, and avenging.

What then is the amount of this charge? Is it not evident that the Begums have done nothing to warrant all this violence and outrage? that the pretence on which the whole business proceeded, was totally unfounded; that no such idea had once been conceived, till Mr. Hastings resolved on realising in this manner, a certain sum of money; that in the pursuit of his object, he violated the sacred guarantee of the Company; broke the faith pledged by treaty, and conducted himself with uniform duplicity and treachery, from the beginning to the conclusion of the measures. That he degraded and sunk the dignity and character of the most honourable office under the
Crown,

Crown, by making the Chief Justice of our possessions in India, run about the country collecting affidavits; that he treated the orders of the Directors with contumely, and quashed the inquiry which they demanded; that every stage of the business is marked with the most unprecedented subtilty, the basest perfidy, grinding oppression, unparalleled outrage, insolent, wanton, and unmanly cruelty. In short, he made a son plunder his mother and grand-mother, and reduced to the utmost distress, two Princesses of high distinction, whom the Company engaged to protect, and to whom several of their servants were under the strongest obligations of gratitude.

Need I state to the Committee that this is no party question? I am aware what factions divide the House. Even prerogative has lately found its advocates among the representatives of the people. The privileges of the people meet opponents among their own delegates. The measures of every Minister
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are supported by one class of men, and opposed by another. But on great occasions, have not the whole body of the Commons often laid aside all considerations of party and interest, and acting with firmness and decision, reflected honour both on their character and the constitution. When crimes of uncommon magnitude, are committed under the sanction of parliament—when the cries of oppression and cruelty are heard within these walls—when the majesty of justice is to be supported, it is our duty, our glory, our interest, to be unanimous. Inhumanity is now before us in such a monstrous shape, that we are bound to regard it as a common enemy. The character of the country is involved in our zeal for its ruin. I trust we shall not relax in our pursuit, till that shocking delinquency which has so long disgraced us in India and Europe, is completely overthrown. I trust the Committee will step forward, regardless of the Minister, or the influence of the Crown, or the prepossessions which interest on individuals

duals may effect, and vote against a series of the most profligate actions that ever disgraced any nation or government on earth. We are challenged by all the laws of God and man, to relieve millions of our fellow-creatures from a state of misery and oppression. It is true we do not see the swarms of human beings who call upon us for relief; we do not hear the bitter lamentations of those who are ready to perish; multitudes of famished females do not present themselves to view, and imprecate vengeance on the authors of their wrongs. But in redressing their grievances, and reckoning with their oppressor, our relief will be magnanimous, in proportion to the distance of the sufferers. Is a British Parliament to wait till its bar is surrounded with the screams of starving children, and crowds of helpless women, shrieking under the agonising pangs of hunger and wretchedness, before it vouchsafe the assistance of its power, or do its duty? No! Let the Commons of Great Britain exhibit an example to nations of stretching the strong

strong arm of justice across the habitable globe, in protection of injured innocence; in reprobating and stigmatizing inhumanity, and in delivering over to condign punishment, whoever dare to prostitute the functions of Government, in pursuits of tyranny and rapacity. It is not given to us, as it was to the officers who had the felicity of relieving, to perceive and witness with unspeakable transport, the extacy of gratitude with which multitudes were seized in the instant of deliverance. The Committee cannot behold the various working of the heart, the quivering lip, the trickling tears, the loud, though tremulous joys of the millions whom the vote of this night may snatch from the vassalage of corrupt power. The true enjoyment of benevolence is increased by the mode of conferring and dispensing its blessings unseen. The majesty of British justice, and the omnipotence of a British Parliament, will be demonstrated by extending protection to the helpless, and assistance to the weak, in every quarter of

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the world. And the blessings of people thus rescued from the gripe of avarice, armed with authority, will not be lost. No. Heaven itself will condescend to be your proxy in receiving the heart-felt gratitude of thousands, and wafting their best wishes to your bosoms.

I thank the Committee for their indulgence in a speech that has carried me far beyond the limits of their time, or my strength, and move that the Committee, on hearing evidence, and considering the said charge, are of opinion that there is sufficient grounds to impeach Warren Hastings, Esq. of high crimes and misdemeanours.

F I N I S.

Sheridan, Richard Brinsley,

The genuine speech of Mr. Sheridan, delivered in the House of Commons, on a charge of high crimes and misdemeanors, against Warren Hastings, Esq. late governor general of Bengal, for extortion, perfidy, and cruelty, to the princesses, and other branches of the royal family of Oude

London [1787]

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